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ABSTRACT

To explore the issue of educational content in basal readers, a study analyzed 34 basal reading textbooks, representing eight of the most commonly used series in American elementary education. Educational content was defined and categorized along three dimensions: subject matter, function, and ethos. The subject matter component covered theories, facts, and information found in the written text. The functional component addressed the applied knowledge of a process nature and included such levels as reasoning/problem-solving, moral reasoning, contemplation, creativity, feeling/catharsis, initiative/persistence, absurdity/paradox, humor in the use of language, and cunning/intuition. The ethos component concerned virtue such as that found in folk and fairy tales. The question asked by each coder relative to each component was whether there was sufficient detail (descriptive, explanatory, or evocative) in each basal selection to code for the presence of a particular content category. Findings revealed that only 4% of all the selections had content on all three dimensions. Of those texts that presented opportunities for subject matter learning, three quarters had nothing else to offer. There were readers with relatively high subject matter content, but the focus of the subject varied greatly. Some basal readers showed the process of human functioning in more than half of their selections, while others contained no educational content of this kind. Slightly less than half of the texts contained essentially no ethos content. (HOD)

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EDUCATIONAL CONTENT OF BASAL READING TEXTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION

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Joe L. Byers, and Margret Buchmann

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Abstract

The choice of a basal text is a decision with implications not only for reading comprehension, but for other areas of the curriculum. Many articles, poems, and stories in basal texts expose students to content dealing with (1) subjects such as art, science, and enduring social themes; (2) applied knowledge of processes of human functioning; and (3) living and acting rightly. But many basal selections contain no opportunities to learn from text on any or all of these dimensions. In fact, across the texts we examined, only 4% of the selections had content on all three dimensions of subject matter, function, and ethos. Of those selections that present educational opportunities for subject matter learning, three quarters present factual information but no applied knowledge about processes of human functioning or models of time-tested virtues. Some basal readers show processes of human functioning in more than half of their selections, while others contain no educational content of this kind. Some are relatively high on subject matter content, but vary on subject focus (e.g., language skills versus science). Slightly less than half of the texts contain essentially no ethos content. What are children taught to comprehend? What are content characteristics of basal reading texts from the point of view of educational knowledge, knowledge that is valued and regarded as worth passing on? What is the picture of young readers--their capacities and quest for knowing--and curricular goals that emerge from the study of typical texts in elementary schools? This content analysis provides a basis for answering such educational questions.

EDUCATIONAL CONTENT OF BASAL READING TEXTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION

William H. Schmidt, Jacqueline Caul, Joe L. Byers, and Margret Buchmann[1]

Introduction

Reading and comprehension do not happen in the abstract; one always reads and comprehends some content. Though seemingly tautological, these statements are important, as is the relationship of reading and comprehension skills to educational content when considering instruction in reading comprehension, because the organization of the elementary school curriculum to some extent uncouples content and skills.

In elementary school, teachers treat reading as a separate curricular area. It is demarcated from the rest of the curriculum with textbooks, most often basal readers, all its own. As a consequence, comprehension of the material in basal readers tends to be taught as an isolated skill, separate from the reading comprehension necessary for the study of such areas as science, mathematics, art, and social studies. Teachers tend to rely on separate textbooks and materials for each curricular area.

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The authors wish to acknowledge the assistance of other members of the Language Arts Project in the content coding of the basals and data analysis. They thank Laura Roehler, Patricia Cianciolo, David Soloman, Frank Jenkins, Linda Vavrus, Barbara Diamond, Susan Wildfong, Robert Hill, and Donna Hamilton. Their assistance has been invaluable.

Goodlad (1976) notes that, in general, textbooks predominate as the medium of instruction in the elementary school. Duffy (1982), as well as Osborn and Shirley (Note 1), point out that teachers also typically rely on basal readers as the context in which to teach reading. In addition, observational and survey data suggest that teachers draw heavily on commercially prepared curricular materials in reading instruction (see Austin & Morrison, 1963; Durkin, 1978-1979; Goodlad, 1970).

In this paper, we examine the prevalent tool of instruction for reading comprehension, the basal text. We are not interested here in issues such as reading level or the nature and difficulty of vocabulary. Nor do we examine questions of consistency with any particular reading or developmental theory. We look instead at educational content. What is the educationally relevant content to which children are exposed as they are taught from, or attempt on their own to comprehend what they read in, basals?

An important question in itself, this gains added significance in light of the typical separation of reading and reading comprehension from the rest of the curriculum. It has curricular implications beyond the area of reading because it addresses (1) the issues of content exposure in general, and (2) potentially missed opportunities for content exposure in reading and reading comprehension instruction. These questions have achievement and resource implications.

Time in school is limited, but the evidence suggests that time allocations to subjects have powerful consequences for learning. Language instruction, including reading, has been estimated to take up 40 to 60% of the elementary school day (see, e.g., Roehler, Schmidt, & Buchmann, Note 2). Hence, the potential and reality of content exposure during the "reading" part of the curriculum must not be overlooked.

Basals, as the dominant instructional tool in reading, affect reading comprehension goals as well. Bettelheim and Zelan (1981) report from their clinical studies that children could not remember what they had read in a basal story because it was meaningless to them. These young readers felt the basal selections did not deal with substantive issues such as coping with life's more serious problems. Bettelheim and Zelan conclude that basal texts, "have become emptier and emptier. . . . Since the texts have no meaning, the child is expected to learn skills without their being meaningfully applied. . . . Because this has happened children are not interested in learning to read" (p. 265). If it seems there's nothing worth reading, why bother with reading?

To explore the issue of educational content in basal readers, we analyzed 34 recent basal reading textbooks, representing eight of the most commonly used series in American elementary education.

Three dimensions define and categorize educational content for purposes of analysis: subject matter, function, and ethos (these are more fully explained in the following section). These categories represent central aspects of educationally relevant knowledge that can be characterized as "knowing that," "knowing how," and "knowing to," or as knowledge of facts, skills, and right action.

In this paper we present the results of the content analysis, a profile of the educational content to which American students are exposed through elementary school basal reading textbooks.

A Taxonomy of Content

To describe the substantive context in which reading comprehension is taught and learned when basal selections are used, we needed a definition of content together with a taxonomy to elucidate the distinctions embedded in the

definition. Three components, taken together, operationalize the concept of educational content: subject matter, function, and ethos. In our analysis, each is itself variable in that it is characterized by a series of distinctions, including its own absence.

The components of content can be thought of as the dimensions of a three dimensional matrix. Each cell in the matrix represents a content defined in terms of a level for each of three dimensions, including its absence. This implies that one cell in the matrix represents the absence of all three components of content. Though this might appear to be a null set, it actually represents the absence of educationally relevant content according to certain categories. In what follows, this will be clarified.

Subject Matter Content

The subject matter component covers theories, facts and information found in written text. The traditional building blocks of the elementary school curriculum are the levels of this factor: language skills, fine arts and crafts, physical education (sports and recreation), mathematics, music, science, philosophy, economics, psychology, and social studies.

A selection might be coded as having language skills content if, for example, it included information about word origins or sign language. A selection about how such units of measure as feet and inches came into being would be coded as having mathematics content. The social studies are subdivided as a content area by the subject matter of the social sciences (history, geography, anthropology) and the treatment of social themes. A story about how Columbus discovered America, for example, would be coded as having history content. The social themes concern enduring problems of individual and social life, such as growing up, taking responsibility (growth and development), and living with others (family, significant others, peers, and community).

Knowledge in this dimension means knowing that something is true, something has happened, or that something is conceptualized in certain ways. A humorous limerick would be coded as not having any subject matter content.

Functional Content

This component is concerned with applied knowledge of a process nature. It answers the question, "How?" Basal selections, for example, that contain a detailed description of scientific processes of discovery and analysis would be coded as having functional content. But the fictional treatment of problem solving in the context of mysteries conveys process knowledge as well, and would also be coded as having functional content (through the model provided by a sleuth, the reader gains insight into how to go about finding things out). Levels of this content factor include reasoning/problem solving, moral reasoning, contemplation, creativity, feeling/catharsis, initiative/persistence, absurdity/paradox, humor in the use of language, and cunning/intuition.

Thus, functional content spans the variety of activities of the life of the mind and emotions that people have valued and passed on in texts. In their literary forms--poems, fables, stories, rhymes, and jingles--these texts present a variety of opportunities to describe and model these processes. For example, the story of a young blind girl, on a hike with her cousin who falls and breaks his leg, who reasons that she can find the way back to camp for help by following the sound of the river was coded as having reasoning/problem-solving content. An essay simply describing a particular place would be coded as having no functional content.

Ethos Content

The ethos component concerns virtue, that which people ought to do. In basals, this content component is found especially in folk and fairy tales that center on a particular act and/or feeling that people ought to either strive for or avoid. The levels of this content factor are humility, patience/forbearance, courage, kindness/generosity, honesty, hope, and "other." Ethos content explains or demonstrates what people ought to do in order to live rightly; it presents the ethical knowledge of ordinary life with its time-tested virtues.

A story in which a child does a kind deed for someone and is later rewarded for it would be coded as having kindness/generosity content. A story in which a child simply takes a trip would be coded as having no ethos content.

Procedures

The Basals

We analyzed 34 basals, representing the second-, fourth-, and fifth-grade texts of eight major publishing companies. These companies dominate the American basal-text market. We chose second grade so as to have some representation at the lower elementary level, but concentrated on the upper elementary level (fourth and fifth grade) where reading comprehension is a major focus. We analyzed the most recent series available from the company at the time the study was conducted. In addition to the text (or texts in the case of the second grade) for each of the three grade levels in that series, a fifth-grade literature basal was included from Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich. This book is considered by the company as a part of the series (they also have

a fourth-grade literature basal that we did not analyze). The names of the texts and the publishing companies are as follows:

Houghton-Mifflin (1979)

Sunburst (2nd)[2]
Tapestry (2nd)
Medley (4th)
Keystone (5th)

Scott-Foresman (1978)

Hootenanny (2nd)
Daisy Days (2nd)
Flying Hoofs (4th)
Fins & Tails (5th)

Ginn (1979)

One to Grow On (2nd)
The Dog Next Door (2nd)
A Lizard to Start With (4th)
Tell Me How the Sun Rose (4th)
Measure Me, Sky (5th)

Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich (1979)

World of Surprises (2nd)
People and Places (2nd)
Building Bridges (4th)
Reaching Out (5th)
Changing Scenes (5th-Literature)

Harper and Row (1980)

Wings and Wishes (2nd)
Pets and Promises (2nd)
Dreams and Dragons (4nd)
Moccasins and Marvels (5th)

Holt, Rinehart and Winston (1977)

People Need People (2nd)
The Way of the World (2nd)
Time to Wonder (4th)
Freedom's Ground (5th)

Laidlaw (1980)

Tricky Troll (2nd)
Wide-Eyes Detectives (2nd)
Reflections (4th)
Patterns (5th)

Open Court (1979)

A Flint Holds Fire (2nd)
From Sea to Sea (2nd)
Burning Bright (4th)
Spirit of the Wind (5th)

Coding Procedures

Each basal selection was analyzed separately on all three dimensions of educationally relevant content. The question asked by the coder relative to each component was whether there was sufficient detail--descriptive, explanatory, or evocative--to code for the presence of a particular content category. The mere mention of a subject matter or appearance of a social theme did not warrant coding for that content. Nor did the fact that the selection was a

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[2]Refers to grade level.

fairy tale or a mystery story imply that ethos or functional content was automatically coded as present. Detailed conventions were developed to regulate coding.

After some practice, determining whether there was sufficient detail to code for subject matter content in factually oriented basal selections became straightforward. For fictional selections, subject matter content mostly concerned social or life themes. To be coded as having subject matter content, a selection had to have enough detail to give the reader an opportunity to gain a conceptual and/or factual understanding of how to cope with some aspect of life. If in the rater's judgment this was lacking, the rater coded the selection as having no subject matter content.

In the functional content domain, educationally relevant processes were often modeled by a main character. Again, not all selections in which the protagonist (or author if s/he assumed a point of view) solved a problem, was confronted with a moral dilemma, or contemplated some aspect of the world were coded as having functional content. There had to be enough detail for the reader to gain some cognitive understanding of what was involved in the particular kind of human functioning presented.

The key feature for determining the presence of ethos content was that a virtue be rewarded or its opposite punished. Also, the punishment or reward had to be meeted out by someone with authority, and there had to be a character in the selection with whom a child could identify. When all elements were present in sufficient detail, the selection was coded as having ethos content.

For all three dimensions, the aim was to determine whether a basal selection in itself would constitute an opportunity to learn substantive content. Selections could be coded as having content on more than one dimension.

Selections were also coded as one of the following literary forms: fantasy, historical fiction, realistic fiction, fairy or folk tales, science fiction, poetry, letters, journals, speeches, plays, songs, factual articles, advertisements, cartoons/jokes, and riddles/puzzles.

Inter-Rater Reliability

A team of eight coders performed the content analyses. Each was trained and then coded a randomly selected pilot text. This led to revisions of the taxonomy and coding rules. Following the pilot and revisions, 30 selections (10 from each of three basals randomly selected by grade level) were coded by all eight coders. Coders had 86% agreement on the subject matter dimension, 84% on the functional dimension, and 97% on the ethos dimension, a high level of inter-rater agreement.

Given the high agreement, only one rater coded each basal in the actual coding of the 34 basals for the study. However, to check for coder error, a sampling plan was developed based on the number of selections found in each book. A second rater coded 10% of the selections in each basal. If the two coders disagreed on the categorization of enough selections in this sample, so as to cast doubt on the assumption that there was at least 90% inter-rater agreement over the entire book, the entire book was recoded by a panel of three coders. Probability tables were developed to aid in this decision process.

Results

Variation Among Selections

Subject matter dimension. Of the 1,959 individual selections contained in the 34 basals, 360 different coding combinations, each representing a different content, characterized the range of differences on the subject-matter

dimension.[3] An analysis of the number of selections coded as containing content under each of six major subject matter designations illustrates the general areas most frequently addressed in elementary basals (see Table 1). Of the 1,959 selections, 42.3% had no subject matter content, 20.3% had language skills content, 19.9% had social science content, and 11.9% had science content. Less than 6% of the total selections had content in any other major subject matter area (e.g., art, physical education, philosophy, mathematics, and music).

Functional dimension. No functional content was found in 70.9% of the 1,959 selections (see Table 2). The most frequently represented functional content categories were these: initiative/persistence (5.4%), contemplation (4.5%), reasoning/problem-solving (4.0%), and cunning/intuition (3.7%). The remaining categories each accounted for 3% or less of the selections.

Ethos dimension. Selections having no ethos content comprised 87.7% (1,719 selections) of the total. The ethos categories most frequently present were kindness/generosity and courage, totaling 8.5% of the selections (see Table 3).

Literary form. The two literary forms most frequently used across selections were factual articles (38.6%) and stories (37.4%), which together accounted for three fourths of all selections (see Table 4). The next most

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[3]The 10-digit subject matter code, for example, can distinguish between a selection with science content and a selection with social studies content. In addition, it can subdivide science into general science, biology, physics/chemistry, and technology. The biological sciences can be further characterized as human, animal, plant, ecology, and so on. This detailed coding of the subject-matter content of each selection can provide a manageable cataloging system for teachers to aid them in choosing selections.

Table 1

Frequency of Content Categories on the Subject Matter Dimension

Subject Matter	Number of Selections	Percentage of Total
No Subject Matter Content	828	42.3
Language Skills	398	20.3
Fine Arts and Crafts	63	3.2
Physical Education	30	1.5
Mathematics	8	.4
Music	8	.4
Science	234	11.9
Philosophy	1	.1
Social Science	389	19.9
Economics	4	.2
Psychology	11	.6
History, Geography, and Anthropology (HGA)	175	8.9
Social Themes	120	6.1
Both HGA and Social Themes	79	4.0
Total	1959	100.0

Table 2

Frequency of Content
Categories on the Functional Dimension

Functional Content	Number of Selections	Percentage of Total
No Functional Content	1389	70.9
Reasoning/Problem Solving	79	4.0
Moral Reasoning	59	3.0
Contemplation	81	4.1
Creativity	55	2.8
Feeling/Catharsis	21	1.1
Initiative/Persistence	105	5.4
Absurdity/Paradox	53	2.7
Humor in the Use of Language	44	2.2
Cunning/Intuition	73	3.7
Total	1959	100.0

Table 3

Frequency of Content Categories
on the Ethos Dimension

Ethos Content	Number of Selections	Percentage of Total
No Ethos Content	1719	87.7
Humility	20	1.0
Patience/Forebearance	18	.9
Courage	77	3.9
Kindness/Generosity	91	4.6
Honesty	16	.8
Hope	6	.3
Other	12	.6
Total	1959	100.0

Table 4

Frequency of Literary Forms

Literary Form	Number of Selections	Percentage of Total
Stories	733	37.4
Fantasy	123	6.3
Historical Fiction	72	3.7
Realistic Fiction	341	17.4
Fairy and Folk Tales	183	9.3
Science Fiction	8	.4
Other Stories	6	.3
Poetry, Rhymes, and Limericks	380	19.4
Letters	2	.1
Journals	5	.3
Plays	27	1.4
Songs	9	.5
Factual Articles	757	38.6
Cartoons and Jokes	9	.5
Riddles and Puzzles	37	1.9
Total	1959	100.0

frequently used literary form was poetry (19.4%), with the remaining forms accounting for less than 5% of the selections. The most frequently used story form was realistic fiction (17.4%)

The literary form of a selection has an impact on the nature of its educational content. Of the prose selections (including stories, factual articles, letters, journals, plays, and speeches) 72% had subject matter content, while only 10% of selections classified as poetry, rhymes, advertisements, cartoons, and riddles had such content. Most of the content in prose selections dealt with language skills (25%), social studies (25%) or science (15%).

Functional content was well represented in poetry selections (45%) but only modestly so in prose selections (26%). There were no major differences in ethos content among the literary forms.

Grade level. Striking differences existed among grade levels in the use of literary form and in the presence of educational content. The number of selections with subject matter content increased for higher grade levels, with an increase of 17.4% from second grade (52.1%) to fifth grade (34.7%). This change seems related to an increase in selections containing social science/philosophy content (from 14 to 26%). The same pattern held for both functional and ethos content, although for ethos content the increase was not as great. Although the increase from second to fifth grade in functional content was similar to that for subject matter content, the fourth-grade selections had the smallest percentage of functional content (see Table 5).

At all grade levels, the literary form most frequently used was "factual article," ranging from 33.8% of the second-grade selections to 41.8% of the fifth-grade selections. The second most frequently used literary form at the second-grade level was realistic fiction, and at the fourth- and fifth-grade

Table 5

Grade Level Differences in The Educational Content of Selections

	Subject Matter Content					Functional Content						Ethos Content							
Grade Level	None	Language Skills	Science	Social Science and Philosophy	Other	None	Reasoning	Contemplation	Initiative	Cunning	Other	None	Humility	Patience	Courage	Kindness	Honesty	Hope	Other
2	52.1[a]	18.4	10.9	13.7	4.9	85.7	2.8	1.1	3.5	2.7	4.2	92.7	.6	.6	1.1	3.8	.8	.4	0.0
4	38.1	21.2	12.5	21.5	6.7	59.8	5.9	4.6	6.1	3.6	20.0	86.9	1.6	1.1	4.6	3.6	.5	.3	1.3
5	34.7	21.7	12.6	25.9	5.1	65.1	3.6	7.0	6.7	5.0	12.6	83.2	.9	1.1	6.4	6.5	1.1	.2	.6

[a]All numbers refer to percentage of selections.

levels, it was poetry. Other grade level changes were a drop in fantasy, and a corresponding increase in historical fiction.

Content defined at the cell level. The above discussion examined the marginals of the content taxonomy (i.e., the frequencies associated with the levels of each of the three components) separately. The taxonomy is comprised of three dimensions, which taken together define content as a cell in the matrix. This, however, results in over 800 different cells or content areas, even when ignoring various subclassifications.

To simplify the multidimensional complexity of our definition of content, while capturing major content distinctions, we dichotomized each of the three dimensions into the presence or absence of content; this produced eight cells (see Table 6).

Table 6

Frequency of Content Categories
Defined by the Three Dimensions

	Contains subject matter content		No subject matter content	
	Contains functional content	No functional content	Contains functional content	No functional content
Contains ethos content	81[a] (4%)	30 (2%)	43 (2%)	86 (4%)
No ethos content	156 (8%)	868 (44%)	290 (15%)	405 (21%)

[a]Refers to number of selections. Total number of selections was 1,959 (100%).

The cell defined as the absence of educational content on all three dimensions is of particular importance to those thinking about the teaching of reading comprehension using basal texts. The 405 selections coded in this cell represent slightly more than 20% of all selections in the 34 basals. This suggests the usefulness for teaching reading comprehension of a sizable number of selections might be questioned from a curricular point of view.

The largest single cell, representing almost 45% of the selections, was defined by the presence of subject matter content together with the absence of both functional and ethos content. The only other cells with large frequencies are the presence of functional content together with the absence of both subject matter and ethos content (290 selections, 15%), and the presence of both subject matter and functional content together with the absence of ethos content (156 selections, 8%). The latter is the only cell accounting for over 5% of the selections that involves the presence of content on more than one dimension. In fact, only 16% of the selections had content on more than one dimension. The implication is that for those selections having content, the marginal frequencies described in the previous sections give, for the most part, an adequate description of the nature of that content. Note that only 4% of the selections had content on all three dimensions.

The profile of the 310 selections coded as having content on more than one dimension reveals the presence of numerous cells in the taxonomy (content areas) describing only a few cases each. The only clustering involves two cells, which together account for 25% of such selections. The two cells both indicate social studies content but in one cell it was combined with reasoning/problem solving content, and in the other it was combined with initiation/persistence content. In both cases there was no ethos content.

Another way to examine the results of Table 6 is by the use of conditional statements. Of those selections coded as having subject matter content, 20.8% also had functional content and 7.1% had both functional content and ethos content. However, of those having subject matter content, 76.5% had neither functional nor ethos content. Looking at only those selections with no subject matter content, 49.2% also did not have functional or ethos content, 35.2% had functional content only, 10.4% had ethos content only, and 5.2% had both functional and ethos content.

Variation Among Basals

While the above analyses provide a profile of the total pool of selections available to elementary students through the 34 basals, further analysis permits the construction of a separate content profile for each basal. If the content profiles vary by basal (and they do), this has important implications for instruction in reading comprehension because a random sample of selections from the total pool would not be available to students in a classroom; teachers at most use several basals, and frequently only one.

Subject matter dimension. The analysis points out salient differences among the 34 basals in terms of educational content. In one fourth-grade basal, for example *(Tell Me How the Sun Rose)*, over 70% of the selections had no subject matter content, while in another *(Building Bridges)*, all of the selections had subject matter content. For most basals, however, between 30% and 65% of the selections did not have subject matter content.

Language skills comprised the content for 70% of the selections in one basal, while another had no such selections. Between 0 and 20% of the selections in each basal had science content while between 0 and 50% had social

studies content. These figures show that subject matter content profiles vary considerably from basal to basal.

Functional and ethos dimensions. The picture is not that different for functional and ethos content. Between 0 and 26% of the selections in each basal contained ethos content, and between 0 and 63% contained functional content. Correspondingly large differences existed among basals on the percentage of selections having a particular kind of functional or ethos content.

Grade level. A grade-level analysis of the differences in percentages of selections with no subject matter content indicated a range of 19 to 64.6% at the second-grade level, 0 to 71.2% at the fourth-grade level, and 1.1 to 64.6% at the fifth-grade level.

The ranges in percentages of selections with no functional content were 57.2 to 97.9% at the second-grade level, 36.7 to 100% at the fourth-grade level, and 35.4 to 93.3% at the fifth-grade level. On the ethos dimension, the ranges were 89.8 to 100% at the second-grade level, 74.3 to 100% at the fourth-grade level, and 64.6 to 100% at the fifth-grade level.

Comparison of selected basals. A detailed analysis and profiling of the educational content of each of the 34 basals is beyond the scope of this paper; a complete catalog describing the content found in the 34 basals is in preparation. To illustrate the basal-level analysis here, we provide a brief content profile of several basals. Profiles of the two fourth-grade basals, *Building Bridges*, published by Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, and *Dreams and Dragons*, published by Harper and Row, present striking differences. Almost 99% of the selections in *Building Bridges* are coded as factual articles, contrasting sharply with 35% in *Dreams and Dragons*. On the other hand, roughly

34% of the selections in *Dreams and Dragons* were without content, while all of the selections in *Building Bridges* were judged to have some content. This was, however, primarily language skills content (64%).

The functional and ethos dimensions also reflect content differences between these two readers. Over 50% of the selections in *Dreams and Dragons* were coded as having some functional content, while no functional content was coded for selections in the other reader. A much smaller difference in the readers is evident on the extent to which their selections reflect ethos content. Neither reader showed a substantial level of ethos content in its selections, but *Building Bridges* had no ethos content in any of its selections.

Using content profiles, teachers can make informed basal choices. If, for example, a teacher wants a basal with a heavy emphasis on language skills, s/he should choose *Building Bridges*. However, if a teacher wants a basal to both facilitate reading comprehension and increase science or social studies knowledge, *Dreams and Dragons* would be a better selection.

Basals can also be compared on literary form. The three basals, for example, with the highest percentage of selections coded as realistic fiction were *The Dog Next Door* (47.8%), *One to Grow On* (37.3%), and *Tricky Troll* (38.5%). The three basals containing the lowest percentage of realistic fiction selections were *Building Bridges* (0.0%), *Reaching Out* (2.2%), and *A Flint Holds Fire* (6.3%). In contrast, over 90% of the selections in both *Building Bridges* and *Reaching Out* were coded as factual articles.

Regarding subject matter, 70% of the selections in *Reaching Out* and 63.8% of the selection in *Building Bridges* contained language skills content. This content focus is quite different from the content emphases of *From Sea to Sea*, in which 46.7% of the selections had social studies content or *Patterns*, in which 20.5% of the selections had science content.

A basal-level analysis also reveals marked differences in the amount of content on the functional dimension. *Building Bridges* contains no selections with functional content. The two basals having the highest percentage of selections with functional content were *Measure Me, Sky* (64.6%) and *Burning Bright* (63.3%). Within this dimension, 18.8% of the selections in *Measure Me, Sky* modeled contemplation, and 10.4% modeled initiative/persistence. Of the selections in *Burning Bright*, 15.6% modeled creativity, and 13.3% modeled moral reasoning. Basals are greatly different, from an educational point of view, even on the "knowing how" dimension.

Slightly less than half the basals (16 out of 34) were coded as having no or almost no ethos content (less than 10% of the selections). That is, they did not contain information on how to live rightly and do right by others. The basal containing the highest percentage of selections with ethos content was *Measure Me, Sky*. In this basal, 12.5% of the selections modeled courage, and 10.4% modeled kindness/generosity.

Variations Among Basal Series

Many districts adopted a single basal reading series for their reading program. In such districts, basals are used to teach reading and reading comprehension across all elementary grades, having an impact on the educational content to which all students in the district will be exposed. Over time, the use of a basal series also has a cumulative effect on educational content exposure for students as they progress through the grades. Hence, differences in the content profiles of basal series have important implications for reading comprehension instruction.

Subject matter dimension. The number of selections having subject matter content varied widely across basal series: 72.2% of the selections in the Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich series[4] had subject matter content, compared to 39.7% of the selections in the Ginn series (see Table 7).

Type of subject matter content also varies widely from series to series. Looking at each subject matter, the publishing companies providing the largest percentage of selections in each area were:

Language Skills Content--Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich (41.2%)

Arts and Crafts, Physical Education, and Music--Harper and Row (4.8%)

Mathematics--Laidlaw (1.5%)

Science--Laidlaw (15.6%)

Social Science and Philosophy—Laidlaw (28.9%)

Notice, however, that the Laidlaw series had substantially fewer selections. As a result, other series had more selections on mathematics (Ginn), science (Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich) and social science (Open Court), even though Laidlaw had the largest percentage of selections on each of those subject matters.

Functional dimension. Across publishers, Laidlaw had the highest percentage of its selections coded for functional content (40.7%), in contrast to Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, which had the lowest percentage (13.8%). The results in Table 8 also show in what way basal series vary on the type of functional content included in the selections. Houghton-Mifflin, for example, emphasizes initiative/persistence; Harper and Row and Laidlaw emphasize

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[4]Each publisher typically has more than one basal series. We analyzed only the one referred to by the dates given previously. For convenience in this section we refer to the basal series by the publishers' name only.

Table 7

Subject Matter Content of the Basal Series

Subject Matter Content	Houghton-Mifflin	Scott-Foresman	Ginn	Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich	Harper and Row	Holt, Rinehart and Winston	Laidlaw	Open Court
No Subject Matter Content	97 (43.9)[a]	98 (33.4)	140 (60.3)	85 (27.3)	78 (36.4)	105 (43.4)	68 (50.4)	153 (49.2)
Language Skills Content	34 (15.3)	112 (38.2)	20 (8.6)	128 (41.2)	48 (22.5)	25 (10.4)	1 (.7)	30 (9.6)
Fine Arts and Crafts	6 (2.7)	8 (2.7)	3 (1.3)	14 (4.5)	11 (5.1)	12 (5.0)	2 (1.5)	7 (2.3)
Physical Education	4 (1.8)	3 (1.0)	1 (.4)	7 (2.3)	7 (3.3)	2 (.8)	2 (1.5)	4 (1.3)
Mathematics	1 (.5)	0 (0)	3 (1.3)	0 (0)	1 (.5)	1 (.4)	2 (1.5)	0 (0)
Music	1 (.5)	1 (.3)	0 (0)	2 (.6)	0 (0)	2 (.8)	0 (0)	2 (.6)
Science	23 (10.4)	35 (11.9)	25 (10.8)	39 (12.5)	25 (11.7)	31 (12.8)	21 (15.6)	35 (11.3)
Social Science[b] and Philosophy	55 (24.9)	36 (12.3)	40 (17.2)	36 (11.6)	44 (20.6)	64 (26.4)	39 (28.9)	80 (25.7)

[a]The figures in parentheses are the percentages of the total selections in a basal series.
[b]See Table 1 for the content areas included in Social Science.

Table 8
Functional Content of the Basal Series

Functional Content	Houghton-Mifflin	Scott-Foresman	Ginn	Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich	Harper and Row	Holt, Rinehart and Winston	Laidlaw	Open Court
No Functional Content	153 (69.2)[a]	239 (81.6)	146 (62.9)	268 (86.2)	147 (68.7)	151 (62.4)	80 (59.3)	205 (65.9)
Reasoning/Problem Solving and Cunning/ Intuition	13 (5.9)	18 (6.1)	19 (8.2)	11 (3.5)	29 (13.6)	15 (6.2)	26 (19.3)	21 (6.8)
Moral Reasoning	8 (3.6)	4 (1.4)	6 (2.6)	0 (0)	10 (4.7)	12 (5.0)	1 (.7)	18 (5.8)
Contemplation	9 (4.1)	4 (1.4)	19 (8.2)	12 (3.9)	9 (4.2)	10 (4.1)	7 (5.2)	11 (3.5)
Creativity	1 (.5)	2 (.7)	11 (4.7)	1 (.3)	2 (.9)	19 (7.9)	3 (2.2)	16 (5.1)
Feeling/Catharsis	2 (.9)	2 (.7)	3 (1.3)	3 (1.0)	2 (.9)	3 (1.2)	0 (0)	6 (1.9)
Initiative/Persistence	20 (9.0)	15 (5.1)	17 (7.3)	3 (1.0)	8 (3.7)	15 (6.2)	12 (8.9)	15 (4.8)
Absurdity/Paradox and Humor in the use of Lang.	15 (6.8)	9 (3.1)	11 (4.7)	13 (4.2)	7 (3.3)	17 (7.0)	6 (4.4)	19 (6.1)

[a]The figures in parentheses are the percentages of the total selections in a basal series.

reasoning/problem solving and cunning/intuition, while Holt, Rinehart and Winston emphasizes creativity.

Ethos dimension. The series also varied somewhat in their use of the ethos dimension, with no series having more than about 20% ethos content (see Table 9). One series, however, only had ethos content in 3.5% of its selections.

The two literary forms most often used across publishing companies were factual articles and realistic fiction, with Ginn and Laidlaw having the highest percentage in the realistic fiction category. In all other series, factual articles dominated as a literary form.

The percentage of selections coded as having no educational content on all three dimensions varied from 16.1% of the selections in the Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich series to 26.7% of the selections in the Houghton-Mifflin series.

Summary

This content analysis of elementary basals shows that the choice of a basal is not only a decision with implications for reading comprehension, but for other areas of the curriculum as well. Many articles, poems, and stories in basal texts expose students to content dealing with (1) subjects such as art and science, (2) enduring social themes, (3) applied knowledge of processes of human functioning, and (4) living and acting rightly. But there are many basal selections that contain no opportunities to learn from text on any or all of these dimensions.

In fact, across the texts we examined, only 4% of all the selections had content on all three dimensions of subject matter, function, and ethos. Of those selections that present educational opportunities for subject matter

Table 9
Ethos Content of the Basal Series

Ethos Content	Houghton-Mifflin	Scott-Foresman	Ginn	Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich	Harper and Row	Holt, Rinehart and Winston	Laidlaw	Open Court
No Ethos Content	187 (84.6)[a]	274 (93.5)	190 (81.9)	300 (96.5)	189 (88.3)	207 (85.5)	110 (81.5)	262 (84.2)
Humility	2 (.9)	1 (.3)	6 (2.6)	0 (0)	2 (.9)	5 (2.1)	0 (0)	4 (1.3)
Patience/Forebearance	5 (2.3)	2 (.7)	2 (.9)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (.4)	1 (.7)	7 (2.3)
Courage	13 (5.9)	6 (2.0)	11 (4.7)	4 (1.3)	17 (7.9)	7 (2.9)	7 (5.2)	12 (3.9)
Kindness/Generosity	12 (5.4)	8 (2.7)	13 (5.6)	3 (1.0)	4 (1.9)	18 (7.4)	13 (9.6)	20 (6.4)
Honesty	2 (.9)	0 (0)	3 (1.3)	2 (.6)	1 (.5)	1 (.4)	3 (2.2)	4 (1.3)
Hope	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (1.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (.4)	0 (0)	2 (.6)
Other	0 (0)	2 (.7)	4 (1.7)	2 (.6)	1 (.5)	2 (.8)	1 (.7)	0 (0)

[a]The figures in parentheses are the percentages of the total selections in a basal series.

learning, three quarters have nothing else to offer the young reader. That is, they present facts and information, but no applied knowledge about processes of human functioning or models of time-tested virtues.

Some basal readers show processes of human functioning in more than half of their selections, while others contain no educational content of this kind. There are readers relatively high on subject matter content, but the particular subject focus varies greatly (e.g., language skills versus science). Slightly less than half of the texts (16 out of 34) contain essentially no ethos content (it is in less than 10% of their selections). But there is a basal in which one out of three selections concern questions of living and acting rightly.

In text, content and form have some inherent relations. Given the differences in educational content, it is not surprising that some basals, at the same grade level, stress poetic selections or realistic fiction as a form. But the range of variations is surprising. Some basal readers have half of their selections coded as poetry, others none at all. The same is true for realistic fiction. Half or none makes a big difference from an educational point of view.

When we considered publishers, we found that they focus on different subjects in their series. Some stress language skills in about 40% of their selections; others have language skills content in under 10% of their selections. The amount of science content in basal texts is fairly stable across series from different publishers (10.4-15.6%). But social science/philosophy content ranges from roughly 10 to 30% across basal series.

Basals are different. They imply commitments to different forms of knowing, and they favor some subjects in the elementary school curriculum over others. Basal texts give or do not give children some understanding of right

living; they address the mind or the emotions, but not both, in detailing modes of human functioning.

What are children taught to comprehend? What are content characteristics of basal reading texts from the point of view of educational knowledge, knowledge that is valued and regarded as worth passing on? Do the educational goals inferred from basal readers make sense? What is the picture of young readers--their capacities and quest for knowing--and curricular goals that emerge from the study of typical texts in elementary schools? This content analysis provides a basis for answering such educational questions.

For reasons as disparate as motivation for reading and learning, limits on time and resources, and educational goals associated with comprehending different forms of knowledge, the tacit curriculum of American basals cannot go unexamined. Basals matter; educational researchers and practitioners must look seriously at the educational opportunities they do or do not offer.

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